

Developmental Functions and Community Media: Is it illusory ?

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Abstract

The developmental functions of community media is widely recognised and well documented by a multitude of researchers around the world in the field of social sciences. Drawing from the functions of community radio, as prescribed by UNESCO, the paper examines the content and functioning of two community radio stations in South India. It examines the developmental aspects of community radio. Ideally, a community radio station should serve the marginalized sections of society by giving them assurance to expression, encouraging their involvement. A voice based media assuredly has a greater impact, especially in rural areas with low literacy rates. In communities with low levels of literacy and poverty, the radio is the most effective and inexpensive medium with which to help catalyse social change (Girard, 1992; Dagron, 2001). When compared with countries like Australia, Philippines and Sri Lanka, Community radio in India is still in its nascent stage. Does it really improve the lives of the community? Or does it simply mimic the mainstream media in its approach by disassociating itself from its identity? These are some of the questions, the paper seeks to address. It attempts to measure the influence of the demographic characteristics such as gender, age, income, education, and occupation of the community radio listeners on their perception of developmental functions of community radio, as outlined by UNESCO, while also looking at some of the challenges faced by community radio operators in South India.

Keywords : Developmental Functions, Alternative Media, Community Media

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INTRODUCTION

A community radio station is defined as one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community (Tabing (2002). The community may be territorial or it could be a set of people with shared or similar interests. It could be a group with similar or same factors like ethnicity, race, gender, caste, class, profession etc. The radio station is often manned and run by people within the community itself, at least in terms of production or it can involve local participation for policies etc. Generally, Community Radio is defined technologically in terms of low-power transmission to a homogenous population area.

Community radio gained popularity in the late 70s over public and commercial radio. The community radio allows groups with limited or negligible access to mass media to express themselves and be heard. This is especially important in countries where the government rule is akin to a dictatorship. Because of the low cost and relative ease with which a radio is manufactured, maintained and operated it has a farther reach than most media and can thus target those sections of society which have been marginalized or excluded. The radio gives them a voice so that these issues are heard which is very important for development communication (Dagron, 2001). In communities with high levels of literacy and poverty, the radio is the most effective and inexpensive medium with which to help catalyse social change (Girard, 1992 and Dagron, 2001).

To be a community radio station, it must be owned and run by a non-profit organization or a co-operative initiative. Generally, the members here are the listeners themselves and its task is to aid and help improve the community life. The principal stakeholder in a community radio is the community itself and this allows the station the discretion to choose what kinds of programmes are run and what issues are addressed and what kind of entertainment it will provide. The essential purpose of the station is to enrich the cultural heritage of said community while keeping them connected

to the mainstream. The process of community radio is to bring people together and generate enthusiasm within the community itself. It reminds the community of their responsibilities and pushes the community to progress and develop in a positive way. (Khamkar, 2006)

The Characteristics of community radio as defined by AMARC (1994), UNESCO and Tabing (2002) are:

- Meet the needs of an identifiable community
- Accessible to the community
- Freedom to communicate
- Participatory
- Ascertain the economic capability of people
- Inspire community well-being
- Enhances interactivity between producers and receivers
- Operated by community members
- Facilitates free flow of information and opinions
- Independent
- Provides access to marginalized groups

LITERATURE REVIEW

Steve Buckley (2000) answered the role of radio in making the citizens of a nation responsible for the political, economic and national management of their country through his research on community radios in Africa by making a comparison between the cost of Internet access and the cost of owning a radio in South Africa. He opined that the same amount of expense can make a radio station serve more number of people and become a gateway to the wealth of information and resources available on the Internet. The analysis showed the growing trend of development of tele-centres in Africa, where people are given a wider access to Internet. The convergence of media widened this trend even better by converging tele-centres with radio studios (termed as *Community Media Centres*). Although there are plenty

of assets for this community radio system, there are a few constraints for it that is also featured in this research. Buckley recommended a greater awareness of community radio among the policy makers and regulators in accordance to its importance and necessary assistance to be given to the community radio sector as it has a remarkable potential to make strategic contribution to education and social development of the country.

Yao Ahade (2000) emphasised the role of community media in French Speaking West Africa through a detailed analysis of the growth of the media, with a thorough cross cut of its functioning, struggles met with, technologies used and more. Despite the presence of the radio clubs and rural printing presses, government continued to have an authoritative approach to the rural areas during 1960s. Around 1980s, new types of community media started appearing with the purpose of promoting the community participation. The role of community printing press in rejuvenating the citizens of the sphere are also given due importance. There were also presence of audio-visual media like drama, which contributed to the citizen's improved interactions and exchange of information.

The functions of community radio in Brazil forms the base for Sayonara Leal (2009) research that acts as the foundation for political, social and cultural discussions and develops into an informative – and at times opinionated – medium. Therefore, it functioned primarily as a public platform. The study had stemmed various modes by which the community radios in Brazil had become a forum for public debates. Around 15 radio stations were analysed with detailed interviews and collection of public opinions. From its analysis, community radio seemed to be the right mode for mobilising the masses for the local development. From the data, a strong demand for concessions to exploit community radio services across Brazil was seen. The study concluded that there was an unveiled potential for community radios to become a social accelerator. A more centric approach was suggested to overhaul the obstacles.

Gergely Gosztanyi (2009) focused on the community radio scenario in Hungary and the regulation passed by the Government that enabled the successful creation of a community radio sphere after years of media oppression. It discussed the issues between the community radio and the Hungarian media authority Országos Rádió és Televízió Testület (ORTT) over the allocation of frequencies for non-profit and community broadcasting. It stated the example of the three most popular community radio stations in Hungary Civil radio, Kikis Radio and Tilos Radio which are all based in Budapest and share the same frequency (FM 98). However, the study stated that due to the specific criteria set down for non-profit stations by ORTT, there were relatively few community radio stations in Hungary. The study traced the challenges of Remete Radio in Pecs-Istenkut that transmitted in a rural area from a narrow valley hindering the broadcast signals. The assessment of the station done in a haphazard manner led to improper planning eventually resulting in a negative impact on the surrounding community. The study also stated that there were significant difficulties in obtaining a broadcast permit from the authorities in the case of the community radio stations.

The journalist Fredrick Noronha (2003) observed that Community radio in India was considered as an effective mode of communication and information for the uneducated masses. Authorities had now made the process of sanctioning license for setting up a radio station a difficult task. Noronha focused on the new trend of community radios being taken up by educational institutions. The students did not seem to be interested in topics of social welfare & community awareness, which ultimately lead to the failure of that community radio. The issues on allocation, assignment, management of radio spectrum also acted as an obstacle for the growth of community radio in India.

During the course of reviewing the literature, the researcher could gather vast amounts of literature for community radio in the international arena and realised that there have not been adequate studies done region

wise and station wise on community radio stations in India. The path-breaking studies that were carried out by earlier researchers pertained mostly to policies of community radio stations even before the proliferation of community radio stations in India. Hence, the researcher embarked on a study to measure the influence of the demographic variables such as gender, age, income, education, and occupation of the community radio listeners on their perception of developmental functions of community radio, as outlined by UNESCO, while also looking at some of the challenges faced by community radio operators in South India.

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the effect of Age of the respondents on the perception of community radio for development.
2. To analyse the effect of Education of the respondents on the perception of community radio for development.
3. To analyse the effect of Income of the respondents on the perception of community radio for development.
4. To analyse the effect of Occupation of the respondents on the perception of community radio for development.
5. To analyse the effect of Gender of the respondents on the perception of community radio for development.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher combined both qualitative as well as the quantitative techniques for seeking the answers to the research questions. Hence, the study adopted the Triangulation Method. Triangulation has been defined as the two or more methods of data collection in the study of human behaviour (Cohen and Manion, 1989). The quantitative part of the study was carried out in the form of a survey. The survey was conducted in two community

radio stations in South India namely Anna Community Radio, Chennai in Tamil Nadu and Radio *Sarang*, Mangalore, in Karnataka.

The researcher constructed an attitude scale on the functions of community radio. The statements were on the basis of functions of the community radio stations outlined by the **UNESCO** (unesdoc.unesco.org), to improve the quality of life among the people by enabling and creating new opportunities in terms of 'Local Identity', 'Diversity of Voices', 'Diversity of Programs and Content', 'Open Dialogue and Democratic process', 'Promotes development and Social Change', 'Promote Civic and Livelihood Awareness', 'Promote Good Governance', 'Encourage participation and sharing of information', and the 'Voice to the Voiceless'. Thirty five statements using the Likert's five-point scale of 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'no idea', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree' levels were included in the instrument.

A sample of 450 respondents who had listened to the community radio shows on a 'regular' basis or 'occasionally' were selected for the study. Respondents were drawn from the listeners of two community radio stations namely Anna Community Radio, Chennai and Radio *Sarang*, Mangalore using purposive sampling technique. Questionnaires were distributed to the listeners of the two community radio stations. 500 questionnaires were distributed and the researcher managed to obtain 450 completed responses. The incomplete questionnaires were not included in the sample of the study.

The qualitative technique, FGD- focus group discussions were conducted with the producers of community radio stations. Focus group discussion was chosen for its advantages, as it is exploratory in nature. The researcher conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) with the producers of various community radio stations in order to understand the problems faced by them. The focus group consisted of 10 members who were all willing to share their thoughts and experiences.

Sample Distribution

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of
'Gender' 'Age' and 'Income' Variables

Gender	f	Age	f	Income per month	f
Men	209	< 16	28	< Rs. 2000	125
Women	241	17-22	137	Rs. 2001-3000	29
		23-28	158	Rs. 3001-4000	81
		29 >	127	Rs. 4001-5000	102
				> Rs. 5001	113
Total	450	Total	450	Total	450

Table 2. Distribution of respondents on the basis of 'Education'
'Occupation' and 'Social Grouping' variables

Education	f	Occupation	f	Social group	f
Illiterate	68	Farmer	53	FC	106
Less than 9 th Std.	46	Student	124	BC	158
10 th Standard	60	Business	76	MBC	82
Higher Secondary	106	Housewife	64	SC	86
Graduate	102	Employed	101	ST	18
Post Graduate	68	Unemployed	32	-	-
Total	450	Total	450	Total	450

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The first section present the results of One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the effect of age, income, education and occupation on their perception of community radio functions for development . The second section presents the results of t test showing the effect of gender on their perception of community radio functions for development .The third section presents the results of the focus group discussions conducted with the producers of community radio stations in South India.

Table No. 3 Results of One-way ANOVA Showing the Effect of 'Age' of the Respondents on their Perception of Community Radio for Development

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Total score	Between Groups	8198.494	3	2732.831	4.499	0.004
	Within Groups	270902.450	446	607.405		
	Total	279100.944	449			

3 (a) Table of Means

Age of the respondents		Total
< 16	N	28
	Mean	123.25
	Std. Deviation	24.066
17-22	N	137
	Mean	128.81
	Std. Deviation	24.291
23-28	N	158
	Mean	132.04
	Std. Deviation	26.136
29 >	N	127
	Mean	138.07
	Std. Deviation	23.191

The results of ANOVA reveal that there is a significant difference in the respondents' perception of community radio for development in terms of age. The table of means shows that those who belong to the age group, 29 and above (M 138.07) show a strong inclination towards community radio functions compared with the other age groups, below 16 years (M 123.25), 17-22 years (M 128.81) and 23-28 years (M 132.04). Hence, it can be observed that the age group 29 years and above has a significant influence of community radio for development which is followed by the age group 23-28 years. Thus, it can be inferred that there is a significant effect of the age of the respondents on their perception of community radio for development.

Table 4 Results of One-way ANOVA showing Effect of
Income on Perception of Community Radio

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Total	Between Groups	7163.417	4	1790.854	2.828	0.025
	Within Groups	224177.2	354	633.269		
	Total	231340.6	358			

4(a) Table of Means

Income per month		Total
< Rs. 2000	N	125
	Mean	136.72
	Std. Deviation	22.095
Rs. 2001-3000	N	29
	Mean	136.68
	Std. Deviation	28.536
Rs. 3001-4000	N	81
	Mean	138.05
	Std. Deviation	21.361
Rs. 4001-5000	N	102
	Mean	132.17
	Std. Deviation	22.752
5001>	N	113
	Mean	127.06
	Std. Deviation	29.429

The results of ANOVA reveal that there is a significant difference in the respondents' perception of the community radio for development in terms of Income. The table of means shows that those who belong to the Rs. 3001- 4000 income category (M 138.05) show a strong inclination towards community radio for development compared with the other income groups less than Rs. 2000 (M 136.72), Rs. 2001-3000 (M 136.68), Rs. 4001-5000 (M 132.17), Rs. 5001 and above (M 127.06). Hence, it can be observed

that the Rs. 3001-4000 category has a significant influence on the community radio for development which is followed by less than Rs. 2000 income group of respondents. Thus, it can be inferred that there is a significant effect of the Income of the respondents on their perception of community radio for development.

Table 5 Results of One-way ANOVA showing the effect of Education on Perception of Community Radio

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Total	Between Groups	15477.63	5	3095.527	5.214	< 0.001
	Within Groups	263623.3	444	593.746		
	Total	279100.9	449			

5 (a) Table of Means

Education		Total
Illiterate	N	68
	Mean	143.57
	Std. Deviation	21.973
Less than 9 th	N	46
	Mean	129.8
	Std. Deviation	29.641
10 th standard	N	60
	Mean	133.33
	Std. Deviation	23.445
Higher secondary	N	106
	Mean	133.53
	Std. Deviation	20.318
Graduate	N	102
	Mean	129.71
	Std. Deviation	25.286
Post graduate	N	68
	Mean	123.19
	Std. Deviation	27.694

The results of ANOVA, reveal that there is a significant difference in the respondents' perception of the community radio for development in terms of education. The table of means shows that those who belong to the illiterate category (M 143.57) show a strong inclination towards community radio compared with the other education groups like less than 9th class (M 129.8), 10th Standard (M 133.33), higher secondary (M 133.53), graduate (M 129.71) and post graduate (M 123.19). Hence, it can be observed that the illiterate category has a significant influence on the community radio for development which is followed by the higher secondary. Thus, it can be inferred that there is a significant effect of education of the respondents on their perception of community radio for development.

Table 6 Results of One-way ANOVA showing the effect of Occupation
Perception of Community Radio

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Total	Between Groups	19446.7	5	3889.35	6.651	< 0.001
	Within Groups	259654	444	584.807		
	Total	279101	449			

6 (a) Table of Means

Occupation		Total
Farmer	N	53
	Mean	143.19
	Std. Deviation	21.194
Housewife	N	64
	Mean	139.56
	Std. Deviation	21.655
Student	N	124
	Mean	134.37
	Std. Deviation	22.206
Business	N	76
	Mean	127.72
	Std. Deviation	21.284
Employed	N	101
	Mean	125.67
	Std. Deviation	29.511
Unemployed	N	32
	Mean	122.25
	Std. Deviation	28.419

The results of ANOVA, reveal that there is a significant difference in the respondents' perception of the community radio for development in terms of occupation. The table of means shows that those who belong to the farmer category (M 143.19) show a strong inclination towards community radio compared with the other occupation groups like housewife (M 139.56), student (M 134.37), business (M 127.72), employed (M 125.67) and unemployed (M 122.25). Hence, it can be observed that the farmer category has a significant influence on the community radio for development which is followed by the housewife. Thus, it can be inferred that there is a significant effect of the occupation of the respondents on their perception of community radio for development.

Table 7 Results of t - test showing Effect of Gender on Perception of Community Radio

		t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference
Total score	Equal variances assumed	0.966	0.334	2.357
	Equal variances not assumed	0.968	0.333	2.352

7 (a) Table of Means

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Men	209	133.43	24.516
Women	241	131.15	25.291

The results of t test as shown in the table 7 reveals that there is no significant difference on the respondents', perception of community radio for development in terms of gender. However, the table of means (7(a)) reveals that men (M 133.43) show some inclination towards community radio when compared with that of women ('M' 131.15).

Table 8 : Findings of the Focus Group Discussions

Question	Response
Do you consider the target audience and the people of the community before broadcasting any community radio program?	Almost all of the community radio operators said Yes. They believe that community radio is aimed to serve people and it's their duty to ensure that it reaches each member of the community.
Do you think it is important to carry out technical training (train individuals from the community on the basic functions of radio broadcasting) for community radio stations across the world?	A majority of the respondents said Yes. They felt that training community members to use equipments and other technicalities would ensure manpower & representation of people from the community, therefore contributing to the effective functioning of the Community Radio. However some felt that training is not always necessary.
At present, is the decision making with regard to program content, duration and schedules carried out under the consultation of one or more members of the community?	All the Community Radio operators under question said No. They reasoned out that as people are not aware of the functioning of community radio and the program content they don't get involved in any such activity.
Do the people of the community select the Station Manager (the person in-charge of the administration & operational decisions) of the community radio station?	A majority of the community radio operators answered in the affirmative saying that it is the people from community itself who select the station manager for the operation of the community radio station. Some of them said that they have no idea about this.
Are the policies of the community radio station framed by one or more representatives from the community?	The respondents had a mixed view on this matter. Some even said that a majority of the representatives themselves are not aware of the policies and there is no question of framing them.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the community radio when correlated with the variables like Age, Income, Education, Occupation and Gender, showed that the illiterate respondents of low income group, farmers and housewives, and respondents above 22 years seem to be having more affinity towards community radio. Thus if community radio stations are promoted aptly by the Government and other funding agencies, it can cater to the interests and needs of those who are socially disadvantaged people. Further radio has the potential to bring in inclusive growth which all the government development policies are trying to achieve. The study endorses the popular premise that community radio can essentially play a developmental role.

The study also reveals that among the different income groups, the lower income groups spend more time listening to community radio. According to Amartya Sen (1998), one of the reasons for poverty is the source of “unfreedoms”. “Unfreedoms” refers to “*deprivation of people’s basic capabilities, such as ability to express their concerns influentially*”. It is in this context, the role of community radio assumes a larger role by giving voice to the voiceless. This is reflected in the present study that even the poorest of the poor are more inclined towards community radio.

The focus group discussions conducted by the researcher sheds some light on the problems faced by the community radio operators. The operators felt that there is a need for periodically training community members to use radio equipments and other technicalities. The periodic training would ensure manpower and representation of people from the community, therefore contributing to the effective functioning of the Community Radio.

Most of the community radio operators felt that ‘Sustenance’ and ‘Lack of Resources’ are some of the major challenges faced by community radio stations. They require long-term monetary support, which they don’t always get easily. Funding usually lasts only for a short period of time after which the sponsors withdraw because of which they have problems pertaining specifically to sustenance in terms of money and other factors. After the

initial funding, the station has to look for its own for funding or make use of community aided help. Community radio stations are allotted 5 minutes (300 seconds) of advertising per hour currently by the government. They also felt that there is a need to increase the duration of advertisements from the current 5 minutes per hour. But even if the government agencies consider this proposal, it will not be feasible for the already resource crunched community radio station operators. The operators will have to acquire selling skills and hunt for advertisers in addition to this they will also have to produce good quality radio content.

The absence of a proper monitoring authority for community radio stations (CRS) also gives the freedom for some of them, especially run by the educational institutions to broadcast classroom lectures and other events which is of little or no relevance to the community members. They use it as a means for filling up the programming slots. The practice of employing students as content producers and RJs by educational institution run community radio stations are also on the rise. This works against the very basic characteristic of the community medium as it is a platform for the marginalised to articulate their aspirations and concerns. They promote the medium as a platform for training their students hands-on, where, ideally, a community media should be the medium of the underprivileged, being the voice of the voiceless. The main characteristic of community radio, its Local Identity seems to be overlooked and the show content is mostly in English. While analysing the content of some community radio stations, the researcher observed that some community radio stations were airing film songs. There seems to be a tendency by some CRS to imitate the mainstream media in its approach. It also raises an important question as to whether the community medium in India is actually serving as a real alternative medium of the voiceless or trying to be just another version of the popular commercial medium?

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